

Learning and Serving through CTE



BY SUSAN REESE

Winston Churchill once said, “We make a living by what we get; we make a life by what we give.” Across our country, career and technical education (CTE) students are learning skills that will help them make a living, while also learning the meaning of giving that will help them, as Churchill put it, “make a life.” It is called service-learning, and it goes on every day in CTE classes and career and technical student organizations (CTSOs).

Learn and Serve America (LSA) defines service-learning as “a teaching and learning strategy that integrates meaningful community service with instruction and reflection to enrich the learning experience, teach civic responsibility, and strengthen communities.”

Citing common characteristics of service-learning, which mostly align with those cited by Janet Eyler and Dwight Giles, authors of *Where's the Learning in Service-learning?*, LSA says that service-learning experiences:

- are positive, meaningful and real to the participants;
- involve cooperative rather than competitive experiences;
- address complex problems in complex settings rather than simplified problems in isolation;
- offer opportunities to engage in problem solving by requiring participants to gain knowledge of the specific context of their service-learning activity and community challenges;
- promote deeper learning because the results are immediate and uncontrived; and
- are more likely to be personally meaningful to participants and to generate emotional consequences, to challenge values as well as ideas, and hence to support social, emotional and cognitive learning and development.

As Scott Richardson with LSA wrote in a January 2006 *Techniques* article, "Like CTE, service-learning puts coursework into context, mixes rigor with relevance, and builds concrete skills."

Building Benefits

There is research, such as the *W. K. Kellogg Foundation Retrospective of K-12 Service-Learning Projects, 1990-2000*, that has documented the benefits of service-learning for students, teachers and their communities. The report looked at service-learning projects from 1991 to 2000 and found that for the participating students, "Benefits accrued in the areas

of personal and social responsibility, self-efficacy, motivation to learn, improved academic skills, leadership skills, avoidance of risk behavior, interpersonal skills and connection with heritage."

For the participating teachers, the report cites benefits such as the acquisition of additional skills and the shifting of instruction to be more student-centered. The teachers also reported improved classroom management, a more positive view of students, and greater satisfaction in teaching and working with youth. The communities benefited because the projects met authentic community needs and fostered stronger collaborations between participants and their communities.

When the National Commission on Service-Learning, chaired by John Glenn, issued its report on service-learning, it included four specific recommendations to achieve what it called the broad goal of making service-learning a universal experience in all American schools. Those recommendations are:

- Reclaim the public purpose of education.
- Increase policy, program and financial supports for service-learning in K-12 education.
- Develop a comprehensive system of professional development regarding service-learning.
- Provide meaningful leadership roles for youth in all aspects of service-learning.

The report also includes this comment from Colin Powell: "Service-learning is a particularly fertile way of involving young people in community service, because it ties helping others to what they are learning in the classroom. In the process, it provides a compelling answer to the pe-

rennial question: 'Why do I have to learn this stuff?'" As the founding chairman of America's Promise, Powell has long been a proponent of keeping students engaged in education as a means of dropout prevention. He clearly understands that connecting their classroom experiences with future career possibilities, and providing meaningful community service projects can make a huge difference in keeping students in school.

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Projects for Learning and Serving

Career and technical educators understand the importance of making learning relevant for their students, and they often use service projects to demonstrate how the skills and knowledge students are acquiring in their classrooms, labs and CTSOs can make a real difference—both today and in the future.

Family and consumer sciences (FACS)

education classes—and their CTSO, Family, Career and Community Leaders of America (FCCLA)—have tackled issues such as obesity, pregnancy prevention and youth violence that connect with what is being taught in the FACS classroom. They have made quilts and blankets for babies in hospitals and homeless shelters. In a number of construction technology programs, students are applying their classroom knowledge in service projects such as building houses for Habitat for Humanity and repairing homes for the elderly citizens in their communities. Health occupations students have engaged in projects that include dental clinics and blood drives.

Serving and learning go hand-in-hand in CTE, as a look at some of the projects going on around the country clearly demonstrates. For example, at the Miami Val-

ley Career Technology Center (MVCTC) the allied health medical career class made “snoodles” for the babies in the neonatal intensive care unit at Miami Valley Hospital. The students learned to sew by making the cloth dolls, which the mothers hold so that their scent is on the dolls before they are given to the babies. Through the project, the students not only learned how to sew, but they also learned about the importance of the bonding between mothers and their babies.

At Monroe Community College in Rochester, New York, the Police and Citizens Together Against Crime (PAC-TAC) program enabled criminal justice students to get involved in increasing safety in their neighborhood. The faculty and police planned a community policing program that provided students with the training and equipment they needed to patrol the streets at night, spot criminal activity and summon police. The students also created a Safe Passages Program to ensure elementary students made it safely to and from school.

At Eureka High School in Eureka, California, students in the HealthPath program organize and run the school blood drives that take place twice during the school year—a one-day event in December and a two-day event in May. (HealthPath is a four-year integrated academic career pathway for high school students.) The blood drive has been going on for 15 years and has been run by the student “coordinators” the entire time. The coordinators are juniors, but their preparation begins when they are sophomores. As sophomores, the students write essays describing the reasons they feel they are qualified to take on this task, and those chosen shadow the junior coordinators at the May event to learn the job they will take on in December of the following year.

Carol Dvorak is an instructor and chair of the Business Technology Department at Meridian Technology Center in Stillwater, Oklahoma, whose students

participate in six to 10 service projects each year. For her efforts, Dvorak was recognized as the ACTE Outstanding Teacher in Community Service for 2008-2009. One of the projects is a blood drive, and as Dvorak notes, “The students take care of everything that has to be done on the clerical side. They create the promotional flyer, do the scheduling and appointment cards, and man the sign-in desk.”

The blood drive provides an opportunity for the nursing students at Meridian Tech as well, as they are also able to apply what they are learning in the classroom in a real-world context through a community service project. Dvorak says another blood drive is scheduled for the spring, and the business technology students and the nursing students will be working closely again on that event.

Already having such experience helps when emergency situations arise. “When Hurricane Katrina hit, the Red Cross office in Stillwater was inundated with donations,” explains Dvorak. “Then we had another emergency within our community, and the people who would ordinarily have been in the Red Cross office had to be out handling that. So our students helped out manning the phones and answering questions.”

Her pride in the way her students helped out is evident when she speaks about it, but she also recognizes how it benefits them as well. “It’s great,” Dvorak says. “It gets them out into the community, and they can make new contacts. It’s a really good deal.”

The recent earthquake in Haiti has also inspired CTE students to help. Becky Cox, vice president of ACTE’s Family and Consumer Sciences Education Division and a teacher at Lone Peak High School in Highland, Utah, says that her culinary arts students do a dessert showcase at the end of each lab, and this year they donated the proceeds of the sale to the Red Cross Haitian relief fund. In FACS classes and in FCCLA such efforts are common.

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In CTSO chapters across the country, students are learning to work as team members, applying the skills and knowledge gained in their CTE courses to achieve specific goals that can be measured by meaningful outcomes. They are learning leadership, responsibility and other life skills that will enable them to be good citizens of their communities, their country and their world.



"I've seen and heard about sewing classes making receiving blankets for hospitals, winter hats for homeless shelters and baby clothes for women's shelters," Cox says. "In our child development class, our students work with elementary schools on reading initiatives to help children improve their reading skills. We even had a local trainer come in and work with our students on that. A lot of community service is done in conjunction with FCCLA. At Christmas time there are events around the country in which FCCLA members prepare and donate food to be sold. Our local one is the Festival of Trees, and the proceeds go to the Children's Hospital."

The Role of CTSOs

"A volunteer is a person who can see what others cannot see; who can feel what most do not feel. Often, such gifted persons do not think of themselves as volunteers, but as citizens—citizens in the fullest sense; partners in civilization," President George Herbert Walker Bush once noted.

For CTSOs, helping young people become good citizens is an important part of what they do, and many have adopted

service projects and encourage their chapters to become involved in them. They often include ways to make those projects into service-learning. DECA/Delta Epsilon Chi (www.deca.org), whose high school and college students are studying marketing and entrepreneurship in business, finance and hospitality, has programs that are designed to take community service beyond simply volunteering to the learning and implementing of life skills. As the organization says on its Web site, it provides community service projects that "can have a significant effect on any member's skill levels in organization, time management, decision making, problem solving, communication, persistence and the ability to synthesize information."

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- Business Professionals of America (www.bpa.org) encourages its members to become involved in the organization's national service project in support of the Special Olympics.
- Family, Career and Community Leaders of America (www.fcclinc.org) has partnered with a number of organizations, including America's Promise, Connect America, Feed the Children, and Make a Difference Day. The FCCLA 2009-2010 National Outreach Project is the Children's Miracle Network.
- For nearly 40 years, Future Business Leaders of America-Phi Beta Lambda (www.fbld-pbl.org) has been working with the March of Dimes and has consistently ranked as one of the top fundraising organizations.
- National service projects of Health Occupations Students of America (www.hosa.org) have included the American Cancer Society, the Alzheimer's Association, and Autism Speaks.
- The National FFA Organization (www.ffa.org) has issued a Million Hour Challenge to its chapters across

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the United States to collectively reach 1 million hours by completing projects in their schools and communities in five service categories: environment, government, social/human service, healthy lifestyles and education.

- The National Postsecondary Agricultural Student Organization (www.nationalpas.org) has selected the National Cancer Society as its national service project and encourages its members to participate in local Relay for Life events of the National Cancer Society.
- SkillsUSA (www.skillsusa.org) encourages all of its chapters to plan a community service project during the SkillsUSA National Week of Service, May 2–8, 2010, and has a downloadable guide to assist chapters in their efforts.
- The national service project of the Technology Student Association (www.tsaweb.org) is the American Cancer Society; its chapters raise funds throughout the year for research, advocacy, education and patient services.

A Special Role for CTE

Mark Sponaule is an educator who has seen firsthand how CTE and participation in CTSOs can keep students engaged and in school. As a vocational resource educator for the Carthage Technical Center in Carthage, Missouri, Sponaule

works with special populations and has also served as the lead adviser of the Carthage SkillsUSA chapter for 23 years. His work in his school and community made him a 2007 nominee for the ACTE Outstanding Teacher in Community Service. Sponaule says that he took an active part in SkillsUSA so that his students could have a chance not only to blend in, but see what they could actually do and what they had to offer. "I have some really strong students," he notes, "but for others, there have been times when SkillsUSA and its activities are what have kept them in school."

Among the projects the students have participated in are the beautification and cleanup of Kellogg Lake and making goodie boxes and collecting toys for needy families; however the big project is the annual Christmas parade. It's the biggest Christmas parade in the Carthage area, and requires a lot of work, organization and planning. Sponaule says that the teachers incorporate parts of the SkillsUSA curriculum into their classrooms throughout the year, connecting their students with lessons of leadership and service. A former agriculture teacher, Sponaule has a special appreciation for CTE and CTSOs. "CTE offers a variety of learning experiences and opportunities, and there are many students who like the hands-on learning style of CTE," he explains. "The combination of that and our CTSOs keeps students motivated,

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Becky Cox shares this story about the difference service-learning can make. For several years Lone Peak High School had a special Down syndrome unit integrated in the school. About 12 Down syndrome students were participating in her foods class with other students in the high school, and the results were remarkable. "The kids worked one-on-one with the Down syndrome students and taught them basic cooking skills," she says. "After that experience, a number of my students came to me and said that because of this experience they wanted to major in special education. It was such a positive experience. It was more than just positive. It was actually life changing."

That's a pretty strong testament to the power of service-learning. **I**

More on Learning and Serving

For more exploration of service-learning resources, here are some Web sites to visit.

Learn and Serve America and the National Service-Learning Clearinghouse
www.servicelearning.org

Report of the National Commission on Service-Learning
http://nslp.convio.net/site/DocServer/executive_summary.pdf?docID=1202

National Service-Learning Partnership
www.service-learningpartnership.org

W.R. Kellogg Foundation
www.wkkf.org

Retrospective of K–12 Service-learning Projects, 1990–2000
www.servicelearning.org/filemanager/download/18/k12sl_retro.pdf

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